

critical digest

VOL. IV No. 29

March 17, 1952

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Flight Into Egypt-Music Box, 3/18/52. Irene Mayer Selznick presents George Tabori's new play directed by Elia Kazan. Starring Paul Lukas and Gusti Huber. Postponed from last week...One Bright Day-Royale, 3/19/52. Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse present Sigmund Miller's new play with Glenn Anders, Walter Matthau and Mr. Lindsay. Directed by Michael Gordon...The Long Watch-Lyceum, 3/20/52. Anthony B. Farrell and Charles Coburn present new play by Harvey Haslip starring Walter Abel. Staged by John Larson...Three Wishes for Jamie-Hellinger, 3/21/52. Albert Lewis and Arthur Lewis present Anne Jeffreys and John Baitt in new musical comedy based on Christopher Award novel by Charles O'Neal. Book by O'Neal and Abe Burrows, music and lyrics by Ralph Blaine. Directed by Abe Burrows.

Digests of Current Reviews

Paris '90-Booth, 3 4/52. Weekly reviewers enjoyed Comelia Otis Skinner solo production better than their daily colleagues. Her 14 impressions of Paris inspired by the paintings of Henri Toulouse-Lautrec won rave reviews from trade paper critics Hobe, Variety, and Francis, Billboard. They agreed Skinner has no peer in realm of monodrama, and that she was at peak of career in present show. Kay Swift's music and lyrics, Helene Pons costumes and Donald Oenslager's sets all shared honors. Francis billed it as a spicy, sophisticated dish seasoned with sympathetic understanding, while Hobe termed it a novel, stimulating evening in the theatre. Variety aisle sitter noted that show business has failed to exploit Skinner, one of the most versatile talents of our time. Gabriel, Cue, and Newsweek man okayed proceedings but in a milder vein. Morehouse, World Telegram & Sun, believes Emyln Williams' Dickens' Readings had more emotional impact, but Skinner show has style, skill and variety. Gibbs, New Yorker, and WCBS Bill Leonard filed dissenting votes. Former found evening by talented actress left him rather numb, while broadcaster placed blame on Skinner's lack of that warm personality characteristic of the great artist. Time didn't report on production.

Venus Observed-Century, 2/13/52. Diverse delayed views on Christopher Fry's new verse drama reported by a brace of weekly appraisers. Brown, Saturday Review, filed an admittedly "yes and no" verdict. Acting, production and many of speeches were okayed, but critic thought theatre too large for Fry play and that brightness of speeches didn't hide their emptiness. Clurman, New Republic, feared that Rex Harrison was miscast, his manner was brittle and worldly, rather than graciously regretful. Meaning of Fry's plays are clear, Clurman stated, to those who will pay attention. Most directors fail to appreciate Fry in terms of feeling, atmosphere and significance. Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, praised all elements of superbly produced, excellently cast play. But he was startled that Harrison's actions reflected many mannerisms of Director Laurence Olivier. Lilli Palmer and John Williams were complimented in lavish Theatre Guild production. Krutch, Nation, panned play because he felt Fry has yet to learn how to use his dazzling gift for words. So far in all his plays the plots exist as mere excuses for the speeches. One thing the present show proves, Krutch points out, is that the answer to Fry's problem does not lie in the conventional realistic drama.

News & Notes

Shows that closed include Women of Twilight, Emyln Williams' Dickens' Readings...
Two on the Aisle.

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' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '
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|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. NY Times | 12. Chr.Science Monitor | 23. WCBS Leonard |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 13. Journal of Commerce | 24. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 14. Morning Telegraph | 25. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 15. Ward Morehouse | 26. Nation |
| 5. NY Compass | 16. George Jean Nathan | 27. New Leader WEVD |
| 6. NY Post | 17. Wall Street Journal | 28. New Republic |
| 7. NY Journal American | 18. Women's Wear | 29. Newsweek |
| 8. NY World Telegram-Sun | 19. Billboard | 30. New Yorker |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle | 20. Variety | 31. Park East |
| 10. L.I.Press | 21. Critical Digest | 32. Saturday Review |
| 11. Newark News | 22. Theatre Arts | 33. Time |

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-so" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise stated critics voted "pro."

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| CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50 | Con: 19-22-26-28. So-So: 3. None: 10-14-21-23. |
| THE CONSTANT WIFE-12/8/51 | Con: 3-25-30. None: 11-13-14-15-17-18-21-26-28-31. |
| THE FOURPOSTER-10/24/51 | Con: 2-6-15-16-22-24-27-30-33. None: 14-18-26-28-29-32. |
| GIGI-11/24/51 | Con: 1-4-5-6-8-12-15-25-27-28-32-33. None: 14-23. |
| GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50 | Con: 26. None: 10-21. |
| I AM A CAMERA-11/28/51 | Con: 3-5-12-27-28. So-So: 1. None: 10-13-14-18-21-26. |
| JANE-2/1/52 | Con: 2-7-9-19-24-27-28-32-33. None: 5-10 thru 16-21-22-31. |
| THE KING AND I-3/29/51 | Con: 26. None: 10-21-22-24. |
| THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51 | Con: 16-22. None: 10-21-26-32. /32. |
| MRS. McTHING-2/20/52 | Con: 4-7-23-27-30-33. None: 12-14-15-16-22-24-26-28-29-31. |
| PAINT YOUR WAGON-11/10/51 | Con: 2-6-7-15-20-23. None: 14-18-27-28-32. |
| PAL JOEY-1/3/52 | Con: 27. None: 13-14-17-28-31. |
| POINT OF NO RETURN-12/13/51 | Con: 8-22-26-27-28-33. None: 7-11-14-21-23-31. |
| REMAINS TO BE SEEN-10/3/51 | Con: 1-7-16-17-21-22-24-26-28-30-33. None: 12-13-17. |
| THE SHRIKE-1/15/52 | Con: 8-16-22-26-27. None: 12-13-14-17-21-31. |
| SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49 | Con: 33. So-So: 25. None: 5-9-10-11-21-24-26-27-28. |
| STALAG 17-5/8/51 | Con: 4-25-26-27-30. So-So: 3. None: 10-21-22. |
| TOP BANANA-11/1/51 | Con: 6-7-27. None: 12-26-28-32. |

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' Theatre News Round Up '
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NY Critics Circle votes April 8th...Sixteen producers to start regular Monday night 7:00 PM curtain September 8th...Collector of Port of New York investigating free entry of foreign scenery...Mrs. McThing moves to Morosco March 25th...Twenty-five West Coast theatre people have appealed to ANTA to set up a play series for Los Angeles...Group of Summer theatre managers have agreed to boycott package shows containing stars this season...Victor Moore forced by illness to drop out of forthcoming revival of Of Thee I Sing...One hundred and seventy Oneonta, NY, students and residents participated in NY Music and Drama week ends. For \$14 they saw three shows, a concert and had all transportation, hotel, meals and tip bills paid...Harold Stern, Show Business, has resigned to join American Comedia Theatre project of William de Lys...John Shubert opening Hollywood office for Shuberts...Current Palace bill expected to close March 27th. Betty Hutton opening April 12th. Beatrice Lillie may head May 10th show...Shuberts have reportedly bought Lyceum...A.S.W. Rosenbach collection of Shakespeare folios sold for more than one million dollars to Dr. Bodmer of Geneva...Morrie Ryskind dropped out of The Long Watch, and had his name removed as co-author...Tyrone Power to read John Brown's Body in summer tour, Norman Corwin is adapting the Benet poem to be staged by Charles Laughton.

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' Green Room Department '
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LONDON-NEW York...TV and ticket scalper vices on Broadway will soon force U.S.producers to think of London tryouts, predicts Beverley Baxter, London Evening Standard. Supply of cheaper theatres and good actors may well exceed other difficulties. British critic also believes Broadway will be using even more English actors in the future. Baxter warned producers not to try to produce hybrid plays in an attempt to appeal to both NY and London publics.

MEETING PROPOSED...Coleman, Mirror, renewed his offer to finance the first meetings of a council to settle theatre's long standing problems. Critic also would "guarantee" the establishment of a cut-rate ticket office. Bernard Baruch, David Dubinsky or Matthew Wolf were against suggested as neutral chairmen for meeting.

COLUMN TIPS...Jose Ferrer will win two "Tony" awards, predicts Winchell...A Month of Sundays being rewritten and recast, informs Gardner...Ninety percent of returned ballots by New York Central commuters are in favor of a once-weekly 7:00 PM curtain, reports Morehouse.

LEGIT LINEAGE...Rise in NYC dailies amusement page rates has tended to reduce amount spent by shows on billboards, suburban newspapers, magazines and other media, surveys Variety. Since there has been little increase in box office scales, producers have had to cut down on other media to pay for increased newspaper rates. Sunday Times won 51 percent of all Sunday theatre advertising in 1951.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Director-critics Kerr, Herald Tribune, and Clurman, New Republic, redirect plays instead of reviewing them, complains anonymous George Spelvin, Theatre Arts...ANTA produced Golden Boy at printed suggestion of Norton, Boston Post, John Garfield told Rice, Post...Critics are sometimes severe and scornful toward trash which they secretly enjoyed a little, admits Watts, Post...Middling good, only halfway bad plays that fold overnight are the ones which keep rapping at a critic's conscience, reveals Gabriel, Cue.

AWARD PROBLEMS...If Watts, Post, wants to somehow nominate Pal Joey revival as "Best Musical of Year" at coming Critics Circle meeting, then Chapman, News, will insist on honoring Shakespeare for his Antony and Cleopatra...If critics vote for inferior fantasy Mrs. McThing as best new play, it will be a triumph of sentimentality over critical season, states George Jean Nathan...Point of No Return or The Shrike are Morehouse, WT&S, nominees for new play honor...I Am A Camera best new play in Watts, Post, opinion.

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' Palace Two A Day '
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Olsen and Johnson typical madhouse headlines current Palace vaudeville program, with Jose Greco and his ballet company and Jackie Miles filling rest of bill. Rice, Post, sole daily reviewer to pan proceedings because he felt showmanship was taking a rest in program that didn't hang together. Pihodna, Herald Tribune, liked most of show, but couldn't appreciate gun powder humor of the comedians. Atkinson, Times, led applause commenting that there isn't a dull spot in the bill. Sylvester, News, believes they know every angle of the famed Palace stage, where they starred more than 20 years ago. News reviewer enjoyed Greco dancers better at Palace than at Shubert Theatre earlier in season. All commented that Wednesday matinee audience found proceedings hilarious.

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' Random Drama Notes '
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FILMS -- Rain will be produced as musical under title "Miss Sadie Thompson" with Jane Wyman...Alan Young will star in new version of June Moon...Katharine Cornell will recreate scene from The Barretts of Wimpole Street for Council of Living Theatre's film "Main Street to Broadway"...Ethel Waters insists upon playing herself in any film version of her autobiography "His Eye Is On the Sparrow"...Emlyn Williams to film his Dickens' Readings...Metro to film Rose Marie...Columbia, which bought Pal Joey in 1941 reconsidering film version...Several film companies thinking about doing film biography on Vincent Youmans...Louis B. Mayer reported to have offered \$150,000 for The Shrike.

RADIO & TV -- Celanese Theatre presents Maxwell Anderson's Saturday's Children with Mickey Rooney on March 19th over ABC TV, and Elmer Rice's Street Scene with Betty Field on April 12th...WNEW Tell Me A Story features dramatic stars reading from their own favorite literary works. Eva LaGalliene, Melvyn Douglas, Cyril Ritchard and Judith Evelyn will be heard...WNYC First Annual Shakespeare Festival to be held May 3rd to May 10th and will present BBC recordings of ten plays, round table discussions and special musical programs..."Gilbert Miller Presents" program being considered by producer...WABF broadcast recordings of Christopher Fry on "The Contemporary Theatre" and The Lady's Not For Burning..."Drama Desk", NY theatre reporters group, considering TV program...One Bright Day advertising via WMCA Barry Gray...George Abbott bowing off NBC TV Royal Showcase, DuMont dropped Stage Entrance program headed by Wilson, Post.

RECORDS -- Theatre Masterworks Company headed by Eva LaGalliene and Margaret Webster first album is Hedda Gabler, with The Cherry Orchard next...Three Wishes for Jamie original cast album to be recorded by Capitol...WNYC plays "Music of the Theatre" daily at 4:00 PM, WQXR "On Stage" heard three times weekly at 7:05 PM...RCA netting \$3500 per week royalties from Call Me Madam...Laurence Olivier's memorial address on King George's death, delivered at The Little Church Around the Corner, has been recorded by Caedman Publishers, proceeds to Actors Fund of America and Episcopal Actors Guild...Irving Berlin receives royalties each time campaign song "I Like Ike" is played...Period has recorded French classics by Comedie Francaise.

BOOKS -- Wilfred Granville's "Theatre Dictionary" published by Philosophical Library...Billboard recommends Samuel Spring's "Risks and Rights in Publishing, TV, Radio, Motion Pictures, Advertising and Theatre" for everyone in show business, published by Norton...Shaeffer, Eagle, highly praised Tennessee Williams' I Rise in Flame, one actor on D.H.Lawrence, but New Directions' \$15 limited edition is out of print...Gide's "My Theatre" published by Knopf, will stimulate you to thought, comments Shaeffer, Eagle.

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' Digests of Current Reviews '
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Golden Boy- Anta Playhouse 3/12/52. Majority of first night critics recommended ANTA's third limited run production of season. Clifford Odets' 1937 Group Theatre hit re-staged by the author, and starring Lee J. Cobb, John Garfield, Art Smith and Bette Grayson won praise from Times, Herald Tribune, Mirror, Post, and Eagle reviewers. Most thought script even more penetrating than when originally done. Kerr, Herald Tribune, commented that some of the actors read some of Odets' imagery too rhetorically. Coleman, Mirror, feels that script itself missed being a great tragedy, but Odets settled for fine melodrama, well staged and well produced. Watts, Post, realizes now more than before the enormous virtues of characterization, dialogue and feeling. No one, including Odets, writes as well today. Chapman, News, and Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, panned production, placing blame on lack of rehearsal time by cast which didn't seem to do more than skim surface. McClain, Journal American, didn't find it an entirely bountiful evening. He noted that problems of fighters have been overdone in all media.

